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ABSTRACT

This study examined the problem of a suspected decline in the number of schools offering courses in the coaching of high school and college forensics. A list of 127 schools offering graduate programs in the areas of rhetorical and communication theory, public address, and speech communication education was generated from the 1986-87 "Directory of Graduate Programs." Catalogues from the listed schools were examined for courses in the coaching and/or directing of junior-high, secondary or college-level forensics programs. Forty-three institutions were found to offer forensics-education courses. Forty course descriptions referred to either forensics, speech activities, and/or debate, and 17 of the courses were actually entitled "Directing Forensics." In addition, 43 schools offered graduate degrees in speech communication education; 11 offered doctorates. Descriptions of forensics direction courses tended to focus on such topics as directing programs, coaching skills, and administration, while there was little emphasis on tournament operation and judging. A prior study revealed a significant correlation between perceived training inadequacy and coaching satisfaction. A needs assessment would indicate whether present coursework addresses issues salient to the forensics community. (Two tables are included.) (SG)

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THE STATUS OF GRADUATE/UNDERGRADUATE
COURSES DESIGNED FOR DIRECTORS
OF FORENSICS PROGRAMS

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Carolyn Keefe in her report on training for the position of forensics coaches given at the Pi Kappa Delta Developmental Conference in 1989 in St. Louis concluded her presentation with a series of questions that needed further investigation. One of these was: "Which schools now offer courses in directing forensics?" This paper attempts to answer that question. This question is asked with a suspicion that there has been a decline in the number of courses specifically designed to train high school and college level coaches. To trace curricular history of departments of speech communication would be a monumental task. We have some data from Keefe's study of Pi Kappa Delta member schools, but that data, which asked for course work taken and where the courses were taken, proved useless, because as Dr. Keefe points out, "Many respondents failed to provide this information or used indiscernible abbreviations," (5). The writer of this paper has no reason to believe that there has been a proliferation of courses. Her alma mater, Case Western Reserve University, no longer offers two semester courses on directing and coaching forensics to be taken on the graduate/undergraduate level. Thomas Hollihan's position paper at the Second National Conference on Forensics in 1984 called for "well-trained forensics educators" and observed that, "many of the most prestigious and important graduate programs in communication have not taken seriously their obligation to teach forensics coaches." (48). Michael Shelton's study of

what qualifications were asked for in the ads in Spectra for forensics positions in the years 1982-84 showed that faculty were asked to teach a total of 54 different courses. The most frequently requested courses were Argumentation 11.7%, Speech Fundamentals 11%, and Public Speaking 8.4%. His table of all the courses requested, which includes the expected Persuasion and the unexpected Radio Programming, does not include any courses in forensics education. Either such courses are taught by senior faculty who aren't retiring from forensics or such courses are not in the curriculum. (128-131)

In order to find out what is the state of the curriculum, the 1986-87 Directory of Graduate Programs published by the Speech Communication Association was used to generate a list of schools offering graduate degrees in the areas of rhetorical and communication theory, public address, and speech communication education. This generated a list of 127 schools. Armed with this list, my student assistant, Jill Smiley, consulted the microfiche copies of these colleges' catalogues to determine what, if any, courses were offered in forensics education for those who would be engaged in the coaching and/or directing of a junior high, secondary, or college level forensics program. Forensics was defined as debate, individual speech and oral interpretation events, student congresses and by the terms "extra" and "co-curricular speech activities." Content specific courses such as argumentation, debate, oral interpretation, and readers' theatre were not investigated. Methods of teaching speech and/or drama

courses were not included unless the title or course description indicated that the course had a substantial focus on forensics. Both graduate and undergraduate course titles and descriptions were investigated. Forty-three of these institutions offer courses in the area of forensics education.

Course content as reflected by course titles and course descriptions may or may not reflect the actual content as taught. Assuming good will and awareness of the contractual nature of college catalogues, a content analysis was done on the course titles and descriptions. The most popular course title was "Directing Forensics." Seventeen chose this title. Forty courses in their course descriptions referred either to forensics, speech activities, and/or to debate. Only three courses specified "debate only" in the course description and of these three, two used generic terms like forensics and speech activities in the titles of the courses. It appears that forensics is the most popular generic term used in course titles and descriptions and includes both debate and speech events. Reference to secondary school programs was made in five course titles; otherwise the courses were directed toward both the secondary and college level forensics educator. Only one course description referred to junior high school forensics.

A connection between graduate programs in speech communication education and forensics education would seem viable as did the link to doctoral programs in other areas of speech communication. We looked to see if such a link was present in speech education

doctoral programs. Forty-three schools offered graduate degrees in speech communication education; eleven of these offer doctorates in speech education. Thirty-six of the forty-three offered courses in forensics education, were at institutions offering primarily masters level programs. Only two institutions, the University of Oregon and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, which offer the Ph.D. in speech education offer graduate work in forensics education. When the schools who offer Ph.D.'s in rhetorical theory and public address were added to the number of Ph.D. programs with coursework in forensics education increased to seven or twelve percent of the 57 universities offering Ph.D.'s in speech education, rhetorical theory and public address. (See Table I). The University of California-Berkley, University of Iowa, University of Massachusettes, Northwestern University, and the University of Utah offer such courses. There appears to be a need for directors of forensics programs to have a terminal degree. Shelton found that nearly 40 percent of those seeking forensics directors wanted to hire Ph.D.'s. Another 34 percent indicated that a Ph.D. was preferred (126). With only seven of the forty-three courses in forensics education at Ph.D. granting institutions, it appears that Hollihan's perceptions are confirmed and that potential forensics coaches doing doctoral work and wishing to take graduate level in directing/coaching forensics have limited choices.

Table I

Ph.D. Granting Institutions

Those with a course
in Forensics Education

University of California-Berkley	X
University of Florida*	
University of Illinois-Urbana*	
University of Iowa	X
University of Kentucky*	
Kent State University*	
University of Massachusetts	X
University of Nebraska-Lincoln*	X
Northwestern University	X
Ohio University*	
University of Oklahoma*	
Pennsylvania State University*	
Southern Illinois University*	
University of Oregon*	X
University of Utah	X
University of Washington*	

*Offering Ph.D. in Speech Communication Education

Is there a demand for such courses? Keefe found that 28.6 percent or 16 of the respondents who indicated that they had training for undertaking the task of directing a forensics program were unhappy about the inadequacy of their training. Another 8.9 percent or five people were ambivalent about their training. Areas which were perceived as being weak were: "formulating program philosophy and goals; administrating the program, including budgeting, fundraising, recruiting, and handling public relations; dealing with the school administration; managing a tournament; coaching debate and individual events, especially oral interpretation; motivating students; counseling students; and developing organizational skills." (6)

In order to see whether the course descriptions spoke to any of these issues a content analysis was done on course descriptions. College catalogue copy is limited in terms of space and specificity; consequently, we did not expect to find "dealing with school administration" or "fundraising" addressed in course descriptions. The areas that received the most coverage were directing a program; coaching skills; administering and managing; and objectives, theory, and philosophy. A surprise was the large number of programs that made reference to preparing faculty to start or establish a forensics program. Tournament operation and judging were lesser concerns. Judging was not mentioned as a concern in Keefe's sample. Dealing with motivation and counseling students were not mentioned in the extant course descriptions.

Table II

Frequency of topic areas mentioned in course descriptions.

Directing a program	20
Coaching	14
Administering/Managing	13
Objectives, Philosophy, Theory	11
Starting/Establishing a Program	11
Tournament Operation	3
Judging	3
Evaluation of a Program	2

Coaching was also seen as inclusive of both debate and speech events. Only three course descriptions were limited to coaching debate.

Are courses geared towards the forensics community desired? A study done by Mary Gill (1989) replicating a 1965 study by Rives and Klopff as to why debate coaches quit found that there was a significant correlation between coaching satisfaction and training. She suggests that the lack of training may also interact with time required to coach, another predictor of satisfaction, because coaches, who are less prepared have to spend more time developing skills. Lack of adequate training may indeed be a factor in determining whether a coach quits forensics. (14)

The sixty-one respondents in Keefe's study indicated that they had received their training through academic course work, related directly to directing forensics or in fields related to forensics, on the job training, or from their experiences as a high school or

undergraduate student. Keefe's study looked at the issue of preparation, rather than types of preparation, so no definite conclusions can be drawn as to sources of training and satisfaction with each source. We do know that 37.5 percent were not enthusiastic about their training and preparation to direct a forensics program. An open-ended question was asked as to what recommendations the respondents had for the training of the director of forensics. Suggestions received by Keefe included course work at both the graduate and undergraduate level and a desire for graduate schools to place greater emphasis on forensics. One suggestion was to "establish a forensic track in a few strong Ph.D. communication programs across the country." Such a suggestion is not inconsistent with a recommendation made at the Second National Development Conference on Forensics that: "forensics educators should design courses in forensics in the academic curriculum. These courses should both serve the purpose of promoting training for future forensic educators and of providing dimensions of forensic related goals and objectives for students within a curricular, as opposed to a co-curricular, framework" (40). With only seven courses at Ph.D. granting institutions, it appears that such goals of providing training for college forensics coaches cannot be met. With only forty-three institutions out of a potential 194 offering graduate work, the future for graduate students desiring coursework in directing forensics programs is limited and clustered in universities offering M.A. programs. Whether this situation meets the needs of

forensics coaches/educators is not known. A needs assessment would tell us whether course work in directing forensics programs is meeting the demand and whether these courses, as they are currently constructed, cover issues and problems salient to the forensics community.

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